(d) Matter is under consideration of the Ministry of Civil Aviation as it requires amendment to the existing rules in this regard.

Opening of Pravasi Centres in Embassies

1059. SHRIMATI S.G INDIRA: Will the Minister of OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are considering to ease the problems of Non-Resident Indians;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether it is also a fact that Government are considering to open Pravasi Centres in embassies; and

(d) if so, the details and the objectives thereof?

THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS INDIAN AFFAIRS (SHRIVAYALAR RAVI): (a) and (b) The Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs has been set up especially to look after the interests of Non-Resident Indians and PIOs. Among other initiatives, voting rights to Indian citizens who are away from their place of residence on account of employment, education or otherwise has been approved by the Government. Also the Pravasi Bhartiya Bima Yojana has been revamped to provide additional benefits to Indian citizens seeking employment abroad. Other initiatives such as the Diaspora Knowledge Network (DKN) will also help overseas Indians to be more closely involved with India's development.

(c) and (d) A proposal to establish Overseas Centres is under examination in consultation with Ministries of External Affairs and Finance. The functions of the proposed centres would be location-specific. Broadly they will coordinate with local overseas Indians and their Associations and arrange value added services like legal assistance, health clinics, family counseling, and investment guidance.

Funding to local bodies

1060. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any proposal to give the funds directly to local bodies in the States;

(b) if so, the guidelines worked out so far in this regard;

(c) whether all the State Governments have agreed upon this proposal;

(d) if so, the details thereof; and

(e) if not, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) to (e) The National Common Minimum Programme states that the UPA government will ensure that all funds given to States for implementation of poverty alleviation and rural development schemes by Panchayats are neither delayed nor diverted. Monitoring will be strict. In addition, after consultations with States, the UPA government will consider crediting elected Panchayats with such funds directly.

Funds pertaining to poverty alleviation and rural development schemes are currently given directly to District Panchayats/DRDAs by the Ministry of Rural Development.

In addition, the 12th Finance Commission has recommended a grant of Rs. 20,000 crore during the period 2005-10, to augment the Consolidated Fund of States to supplement the resources of Panchayats, in terms of Article 280 (bb) of the Constitution. In order to reduce delay and prevent diversion of these funds, guidelines have been issued requiring States to transfer these funds from their respective Consolidated Funds to Panchayats within 15 days of their receipt from the Centre. In order to facilitate States to ensure implementation of this stipulation, the National Informatics Centre (NIC), on the directions of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, has prepared a software that can reduce procedural delays and help in better monitoring of the releases. It has been suggested that States could make electronic transfer of funds through Banks to Panchayats directly. This mechanism has been evolved on the basis of a report prepared by a Task Force set up for the purpose by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, on the feasibility of rapid transfer of funds to Panchayats through Banks.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj has also identified Centrally Sponsored Schemes and other central initiatives that pertain to functions devolved upon Panchayats and proposed to the Central Ministries concerned that a system of electronic transfer of funds could be adopted in respect of them. These include Wage Employment Schemes such as SGRY, National Food for Work Scheme, fund transfers under the National

Rural Employment Guarantee Act (Ministry of Rural Development); Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Schemes such as Swajaldhara, ARWSP and Total Sanitation Campaign (Ministry of Rural Development); National Rural Health Mission (Ministry of Health & FW); Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Ministry of HRD, Deptt. of Elementary Education) and ICDS (Ministry of HRD, Deptt. of Women & Child Development). The matter is being pursued with the Ministries concerned as well as the Ministry of Finance.

States will be consulted through the Empowered sub-Committee of the National Development Council on Financial and Administrative empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions chaired by the Union Minister of Panchayati Raj and their views obtained with regard to the options proposed for rapid transfer of fund to Panchayats without delay or diversion.

Panchayat elections

1061. SHRI SHANTARAM LAXMAN NAIK: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are discouraging the introduction of two-child-norm for the candidates contesting Panchayat elections;

(b) whether Government have officially advised the State Governments to this effect;

(c) the States that have introduced *the* provision in their Panchayat laws;

(d) the States who have deleted the provision after its introduction in their respective legislations; and

(e) whether Government propose to ban such introduction of two-child-norm by a constitutional amendment?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) Yes, Sir.

(c) As per the information available, the States that have introduced this provision in their Panchayat laws are — Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Orissa, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

(d) The State of Himachal Pradesh has deleted the provision after its introduction in its legislation. Madhya Pradesh has announced its